Be My Enemy for Friendship's Sake

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ABSTRACT: Drawing his title from William Blake, the author explores the question of friendship in Iain Pears's novel, *The Dream of Scipio* (2002). Using three overlapping historical narratives, Pears traces how the classical understanding of friendship, grounded in a logic of commonly held values, has given birth to a civilization that is both exclusionary and unethical. He makes his case by using the history of anti-Semitism to show how routine persecution of the Jews culminating in the Holocaust became a way to solidify communities in the face of such crises as barbarian invasions, the Black Death, and economic decline. The purpose of this essay is to examine Pears's critique of the limitations of civilization and to outline his vision of a new perception of friendship that understands and values the ethical and pragmatic importance of difference.

Keywords: *anti-Semitism*, *Avignon papacy*, The Dream of Scipio, *Cicero on friendship*, *Iain Pears*

> Thy Friendship oft has made my heart to ake
> Do be my Enemy for Friendships sake
> —William Blake, "To H——"

> There is always betrayal in a line of flight. [. . .] The "great discoveries," the great expeditions, do not merely involve uncertainty as to what will be discovered, the conquest of the unknown, but the invention of a line of flight, and the power of treason: to be the only traitor, and traitor to all.
> —Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*

"O my friends, there is no friend," Aristotle, it is claimed, once lamented. It is a cry that echoes through Iain Pears's *The Dream of Scipio* (2002), a novel that dissects, with consummate skill, the

politics of friendship and betrayal. Pears's novel unfolds as a set of three overlapping narratives, each from different time periods: in the first, Manlius Hippomanes must negotiate the survival of his lands and people against the indifference of the Roman Empire on the one hand and the invading barbarians on the other; in the second, Olivier de Noyen treads a treacherous path through medieval politics in the service of Cardinal Ceccani, who wishes to shift the papal seat from Avignon back to Rome; and in the third, Julien Barneuve, a French intellectual, ends up serving the Vichy government in wartime France against his better judgment. The stories are connected not only by location and theme but also by "The Dream of Scipio," an imaginary text that explores the paradoxical nature of friendship.

The *Exemplar*

"The Dream of Scipio" is written by Manlius and will be rediscovered, in turn, by both Olivier and Julien in the course of their studies. The reader is offered an explanation for its continual disappearance over time—Manlius took his title from a famous piece of the same name by Cicero, and so his manuscript has been overlooked, mistakenly, as a corrupted edition of the great orator's text. Cicero's version recounts a dream in which Africanus, Scipio's adopted grandfather, appears to him. Scipio is borne into the clouds, and his future victories are prophesied, but the elder Africanus also warns him: humanity's deeds, even Scipio's, are fleeting, so that greatness can be attained only by following the decrees of heaven and acting for the good of one's country. Just as the three narrative layers mirror each other, therefore, so too Manlius's text—the specific content of which is never revealed—acts as both a double of and a reflection on Cicero's. *The Dream of Scipio* is also informed by an implicit critique of another of Cicero's works, "Laelius: On Friendship." Indeed, Pears uses these two pieces by Cicero to link together the mechanisms of power ("The Dream") and the way they impact on the praxis of friendship ("Laelius"). Cicero describes his understanding of friendship in the following words:

> When a man thinks of a true friend, he is looking at himself in the mirror. Even when a friend is absent, he is present all the same. However poor he is, he is rich: however weak, he is strong. And may I attempt to convey an even more difficult concept? Even when he is dead, he is still alive. He is alive because his friends still cherish him, and remember him, and long for him. This means that there is happiness even in his death—he ennobles the existences of those who are left behind. (189)

Cicero's definition seems simple enough: friendship is essentially an alliance, a coming together for the mutual benefit of each party, each friend willing to help and uphold the other in times of difficulty. But the true crux of Cicero's notion of friendship rests on that key phrase, that thinking of one's friend is like looking at oneself "in the mirror [*exemplar*]," the friend is seen as a reflection or a double

that shares the same goals and values as myself. Jacques Derrida writes in *Politics of Friendship* (1994): "Cicero uses the word *exemplar*, which means portrait but also, as the *exemplum*, the duplicate, the reproduction, the copy as well as the original, the type, the model" (4). Cicero's conception of friendship, therefore, is relentlessly narcissistic—in looking at my friend, I want to see myself reflected back at me, united in a brotherhood of mutual familiarity.

Pears repeatedly shows, in the course of his novel, that a friendship founded on an ideal of sameness, despite its objective of providing greater unity and the pursuit of common goals, inevitably becomes sidetracked from such purposes when put into practice. The distraction that turns a society away from the benefits of Ciceronian friendship lies in the immanent contradictions of the principle on which it is founded. The *exemplar*, as Derrida points out, has a range of nuances—the primary sense in which Cicero uses it, of course, is that of an ideal reproduction of the self, the friend as the external reflection of my internal desires. The paradox arises from this interplay between inside and outside, for although the friend, as *exemplar*, is a reflection of my internal being, he or she nonetheless remains an external (that is to say, autonomous) agent, capable of acting beyond the scope of my desires and expectations—capable, that is to say, of betraying me.

The friendship rooted in the Ciceronian principle thus lives within the constant shadowy threat of the Freudian "*Unheimlich*," the "uncanny," the disturbing return of a familiar person or object transformed to the point of alienation. The friend who betrays me is loathed and feared far more than my enemy. It is through this logic that the value of such friendship subverts its stated goal of mutual beneficence. Haunted by the ever-present possibility of betrayal, the primary task of friendship switches from the pursuit of common interests to the overriding necessity of preserving the "purity" of the exemplary image. The friendship rooted in sameness, Pears repeatedly demonstrates, leads to a Pyrrhic victory, in which the potential benefits of friendship are sacrificed to the paranoia of the social bond. Pears finds ample historical evidence for this thesis in all three of the historical milieus of his characters.

In each of its narratives, *The Dream of Scipio* provides the reader with an examination of these questions—who is my friend? who is my enemy?—on at least three fronts. The first is shaped by an external crisis: for Manlius, the war with King Euric; for Olivier, a combination of papal intrigues and the Black Death; for Julien, the invasion of the Nazis. The immediate crises bring to the surface the internal alliances within each society, the exemplary friendships that bind them together before the onset of crises that rupture them. Against these historical backdrops Pears introduces a second front by expertly charting the history of anti-Semitism, for at each point, it is the Jews who, while living within each society, are inevitably persecuted, relentlessly purged to preserve the exemplary "purity" of the social bond. It is this realization that causes Julien, in a moment of clarity, to exclaim:

> This will last forever, and cannot be undone. Whatever benefits we bring to mankind in the future, we killed the Jews. No matter how great the advantages of medicine, we killed them. However high our achievements may soar, however perfect we may become, this is what is at our heart. We killed them all; not by accident, or in a fit of passion. We did it deliberately, and after centuries of preparation. (Pears 374)

Pears shows how the Jews, within Western culture, have repeatedly played the part of the inexorable "other," the element that must be expelled to ensure the integrity of the Ciceronian mode of friendship. The third and final level of the novel's discourse on friendship transitions from the societal to the personal, each character forming his own shifting alliances, relations that inevitably overlap with and are molded by the forceful movement of history—Julien, for example, must negotiate his way between his childhood friends Marcel (a Nazi collaborator), Bernard (a resistance fighter), and Julia (a Jewish painter, and his lover).

Private and Public

Each front in the novel reveals an irresolvable tension between the public and the private understanding of friendship. Indeed, it is an understated (but crucial) aspect of the traditional discourses on friendship—Aristotle, Cicero, Montaigne—that the friend, in their capacity as *exemplar*, must also be a fellow citizen. Pears no doubt also has in mind here the work of the German political theorist Carl Schmitt. Schmitt, in *The Concept of the Political* (1932), argues that the social bond is rooted in friendship. My friend must be not only an exemplary friend, he or she must also be an exemplary citizen. Schmitt's theory essentially brings to the fore the political implications of the Ciceronian model. The "purity" on which personal friendship depends now extends to society as a whole—what groups or individuals, at the societal level, are for or against us? Which reflect our idealized *exemplar* of the model citizen? It is not hard to see why Schmitt's arguments were (and continue to be) attractive to authoritarianism, for like the Ciceronian model, such a system inevitably becomes more interested in preserving its own "purity" than in pursuing the mutual benefits of friendship. Schmitt thus captures the political attitude of his time, a mood that was to be reflected, in particular, by the rise of fascism.

As the story of Manlius demonstrates, however, this fusion of public and private has long been an assumption of Western culture. Indeed, it was the Greeks (more particularly, the Athenians) who first championed the split between "civilization" and "barbarity." The logic of this division, once again, derived from an exemplary understanding of the social bond: whatever was familiar, and therefore immediately comprehensible, was designated as "civilized"; whatever fell outside this circle was different and therefore "barbaric." In Pears's novel, the split between public and private, and the interplay between them, is denoted

by the division of these relationships into two conceptual groups: "civilization" (which indicates the social bond and seems to be inextricably tied to the collective logic of the *exemplar*) and "friendship" (which is personal and open to either collaboration with or subversion of the social bond).

This tension between civilization and friendship lies at the heart of *The Dream of Scipio*. Each of the main characters must negotiate his way through political situations that force him to choose between private loyalty and political duty. Of the three, it is Manlius, author of the "Dream," who struggles the most to reconcile these two positions. Indeed, Pears tells us through Julien, who is studying the history of Manlius's text, there appear, at times, to be "two Manlius Hippomaneses" (13):

> Julien's article [. . .] sought to reconcile these two. [. . .] Manlius's two reputations were reflections of the same man seen through different perspectives. [. . .] Because, he explained, Manlius did not fail to block the Burgundians, he deliberately handed over a portion of Provence to them, swapping the nonexistent protection of Rome for the coarser but more effective shield of a barbarian king. [. . .] Manlius, he insisted, saw that the Burgundians would be a powerful protector for the church [. . .]. Christendom could not have survived without him [. . .]. The power of the papacy could never have grown. And he ensured that the new rulers governed by law, Roman law transferred into a Burgundian code. (13–14)

At the collective level, therefore, Manlius is a brilliant politician, a master at preserving civilization, the societal form of friendship. His genius lies in his ability to overcome the division between similarity and difference, even when his hand is forced by the realization that the Roman Empire is willing to sacrifice Provence for its own political gain. When Manlius realizes that his "allies" in Rome will not help him, he approaches the Burgundians, ironically bearing the signifiers of Roman civilization, recognizing in his "enemies" their desire to be "cultured," to lose their current barbarian status. The enlistment of the Burgundians is thus a strange compromise: the barbarians are brought into the fold of civilization, but in so doing their barbarism is purged. "The Roman people submitted to barbarian rule, but the barbarian rulers submitted to Roman law" (387). The Burgundians, despite their new military and political ascendancy, are "conquered" at the cultural level.

Manlius's manifest brilliance in the realm of politics, in saving "civilization" from the barbarians, is increasingly brought under scrutiny, however, for what it costs him at a personal level. As Olivier and Julien peer at Manlius through the lens of history, it appears initially that the success of his political maneuvers adorned him with a degree of heroism—of reverence, even—a reputation that covered a multitude of sins. Examined in closer detail, Manlius's success in the public sphere comes at a great sacrifice to those closest to him, his friends. Indeed, Pears underscores this "trading off" of the private for public by giving the church official (who makes Manlius a bishop) the name Faustus—by this anachronistic but pointed allu-

sion, the reader understands that Manlius has sold his soul to a metaphorical devil (in this case, ironically, the church) to achieve his political successes. Whereas Manlius subsequently gains a reputation as a saint, it is only because of a perverse historical irony: he is credited with "converting" the local Jews (that is to say, giving them the ultimatum of conversion or death).

What is strange, almost schizophrenic about Manlius's character, is that he undertakes these effective yet ethically deplorable deeds with open eyes. In the realm of religion, for example, Pears makes it clear that Manlius is not simply a zealot. He does not hate the Jews himself, and at some level, he is sorrowful that they are chosen by the people as the outlet for their anger. Reading through Manlius's treatise, Olivier is puzzled by the contradictory nature of his character, and recalls the words of Gersonides, the Jewish scholar:

> "Oh, but this man was no Christian when he wrote this. And he was a bishop, as you say. So go and think yet again; what sort of man can persecute others in the name of a faith he clearly does not profess?"
> He [Olivier] read, then reread, the section on friendship in the light of the death of Althieux [Olivier's friend], and there at least found much to comfort him. The bishop [Manlius] had understood about friends, loved his friends, advocated forgiving them if they erred. (210)

Despite his exoneration in the eyes of history, therefore, Manlius is condemned from the point of view of friendship. He ruthlessly trades off even his closest friends in the name of civilization, as Sophia, his former philosophy teacher and lover is quick to inform him. Disgusted by his actions, she says: "[B]ecause you needed to win the minds of the people, you slaughtered the Jews, who had done neither you nor anyone else any ill. On such things do you build your civilization, and you use me to justify it all" (389). Manlius not only loses Sophia, but he also murders his closest friend Felix to further his political ends. Blind to the betrayal of Rome and the importance of the alliance with the Burgundians, Felix expresses his doubts about Manlius's plan for peace. Eager to keep his promise to Gundobad that the Burgundians would not encounter force on entering Provence, Manlius ends up killing not only Felix but also his family, sacrificing an alliance that had stretched back for generations. Manlius's words to Felix at the beginning of the novel—"We are the civilized world, you and I"—are thus dramatically recast: the true history of civilization is that of brother against brother, one willing to sacrifice his friendship with the other for the sake of stability and order (11).

Enemies or Collaborators?

Whereas Manlius represents the failure of the *exemplar*, Pears uses the characters of Olivier and Julien to undertake a poignant critique of the Ciceronian model. Of the two, it is perhaps Olivier who comes closest to fully realizing the true nature of friendship. In Olivier's case, the personal overlaps with the

political, because his position in life rests on his "friendship" with the powerful Cardinal Ceccani. Ceccani's ambitions are enormous: not only does he harbor the desire to become Pope himself, he is also intent on moving the papal seat from Avignon back to Rome. Ceccani is opposed in this project by Cardinal de Deaux, his archenemy. When Olivier is sent by Ceccani to Bordeaux to deliver a secret message, a crucial move in this political chess game, he encounters Althieux along the way, the chief servant of Cardinal de Deaux and, despite being a few years older, Olivier's mirror image. Pears writes: "Althieux was as devoted to his lord as Olivier was to Ceccani; both would have had to choose between friendship and obedience, creating a conundrum of irresolvable proportions" (188). Althieux warns Olivier that a band of men, working for Cardinal de Deaux, are waiting to ambush him and steal the letter he bears. Althieux chooses friendship over obedience, allowing his private love for Olivier to trump his public debt to his master. Althieux's revelation, Olivier soon discovers, is backed by the heaviest of guarantees, for Althieux dies the next morning in the first wave of the oncoming plague—an event, furthermore, that changes the political tide in favor of Cardinal de Ceccani. In his willingness to pursue the integrity of friendship unto death, Althieux proves to be a true friend and a model for Olivier's subsequent behavior. Nonetheless, the integrity of this friendship is necessarily rooted in the betrayal of his master, Cardinal de Deaux. Althieux thus provides an alternative to Manlius, a figure who is willing to sacrifice the direction of civilization (keeping in mind the importance of Olivier's mission) for the sake of personal friendship.

Olivier thus learns an important lesson from Althieux, and it is through his transformation that Pears unfolds his critique of the Ciceronian model of friendship. The *exemplar* is founded on a logic of sameness, in which the friend is my personal double and, in the public sphere, my fellow citizen. Looking closely at the figure of Althieux, however, these things are only superficially true—in a paradoxical twist, Althieux and Olivier are simultaneously friend and enemy. The character of the true friend comes not from a simplistic point of commonality or resemblance, but manifests itself also in the ability to contradict, to be different—even, perhaps, to betray. The weakness of the Ciceronian model is that it focuses overwhelmingly on preserving the "purity" of the social bond, an obsession that leads to paranoia on the one hand and weakness on the other, with a supposedly ideal partnership thus being transformed into a system of power, a culture in which the dominant partner suppresses all doubt and resistance in the name of loyalty, robbing the friend of independence and, in so doing, transforming him into little more than a yes-man. Pears's understanding of friendship, by contrast, underscores the importance of maintaining the functions of choice and autonomy to preserve the health of a relationship. The friend who is incapable of critiquing my actions, of expressing disapproval, of breaking with me at certain points, is nothing more than a sycophant. The true friend must be allowed autonomy, even to the point of becoming my enemy.

Olivier learns this crucial lesson and, although it costs him dearly, he is true to his ethical principles in a way that Manlius was not. Olivier, like Manlius, is forced to negotiate between the private and the public, friendship, and civilization. In this case the "threat" to civilization comes on two fronts. Ceccani's desire to return the papacy to Rome, for a start, is presented in these terms: "As long as the papacy was there, it was subject to France, that barbarian nation from the north" (179). Avignon was a relatively free city, cosmopolitan, prosperous, and tolerant of the Jews. The impetus for change is provided by the plague, which Ceccani cynically interprets as a sign that the move from Rome to Avignon has displeased God. "The plague itself was a sign of divine disapproval, a punishment meted out against the whole of mankind for this error" (179). As events unfold, Ceccani comes increasingly to blame the disaster on the city's tolerance of the Jews who, he claims, caused the plague by poisoning the water supply. The ensuing public wrath affects Olivier at a personal level, for he is a friend of Gersonides, a prominent Jewish scholar, and in love with Rebecca, Gersonides's servant and surrogate daughter.

The trouble is compounded by an affair between Isabelle de Fréjus, a local noblewoman, and Luca Pisano, a painter and one of Olivier's closest friends. Isabelle's husband tracks the lovers to the Jewish quarter, where Pisano, in his poverty, is forced to live, and the Comte de Fréjus kills his wife in the street. Pisano flees the city, only to die of the plague several days later. In a panic, de Fréjus blames the Jews for his wife's death, his action resulting in riots and the eventual imprisonment of Gersonides and Rebecca. Olivier, stripped of his intimate attachments, considers his dilemma:

> He could bow to the wishes of his master, obey the laws of men as they were unwritten but understood. For Ceccani had given him everything—money, encouragement, a place in the world, even something approaching friendship. In return he expected loyalty; it was a fair bargain, freely entered into and universally recognized. No one would accept that throwing that over was justified. It was not self-interest, although the consequences of breaking the ties that bound him to Ceccani would be terrible enough. Rather it was a matter of honor, the simple fact that nothing could possibly justify what would be a breathtaking treason. Olivier was considering playing the part of Judas [. . .]. (362–63)

Olivier thus finds himself in the same position as Althieux before him, and he acts with equal honor. Olivier goes to Pope Clement and unveils Ceccani's treacherous maneuvers against him. The Jews are the prize in this bargain: if Olivier is correct, Gersonides and Rebecca will be released and the Jews protected by the Pope; if Olivier is lying, Clement vows to slaughter "every last Jew in Christendom" (371). The Comte de Fréjus, looking for revenge, tortures Olivier, cutting out his tongue and smashing his hands—an act that Clement interprets as a sign of Olivier's integrity. Olivier's fate is thus a testimony to Pears's new model of friendship.

The third story, focusing on Julien, brings home to the modern reader the historical lessons learned by Manlius and Olivier. Despite its ruinous effects, the Ciceronian model has endured through the centuries, so that in the final encounter between Manlius and Felix, for example, the narrator observes: "And here was the moment. The end of it all, for civilization was merely another name for friendship, and friendship was coming to an end" (377). So it is that, within this cultural mindset, Julien starts out believing wholeheartedly in the value of civilization:

> A question of civilized values, he told himself. A question of whether or not one is to take a stand and insist that, despite the times, barbarism must not hold sway. How do we justify calling ourselves civilized, after all? [. . .] How does it show itself? Are you civilized if you read the right books, yet stand by while your neighbors are massacred, your lands laid waste, your cities brought to ruin?
> Do we use the barbarians to control barbarism? Can we exploit them so that they preserve civilized values rather than destroy them? Was the old Athenian right, that taking any side is better than taking no side? (171–72)

Julien's naivete is eroded on two fronts. First, his scholarly investigation into the history of "The Dream of Scipio" reveals that the historical perceptions surrounding Manlius and Olivier have been distorted: Manlius has been transformed from a ruthless politician into a saintly bishop; Olivier becomes a tragic poet and lover, for the rumor quickly spreads that he was killed for "his" affair with Isabelle; and Clement is elevated as the wise and benevolent leader who extended his protection to the Jews in a time of crisis.

But it is the second front, in the historical form of World War II, that finally shatters Julien's illusions, that makes him understand the corrupting power of civilization.[1] Pears's underlying argument is that the Holocaust was not an act of barbarity, but a horrifying, material reflection of the values that underlie the logic of civilization. Julien says to Marcel:

> What they're [the Nazis] doing goes far beyond the war. Something unparalleled in human history. The ultimate achievement of civilization. [. . .] How do you annihilate so many people? You need contributions from so many quarters. [. . .] Hundreds of years spent honing skills and developing techniques have been necessary before such a thing can even be imagined, let alone put into effect. And now is the moment. Now is the time for all the skills of civilization to be put to use. (374)

Although the specific principle by which the Jews are persecuted has changed—formerly it was religion, now it is race—the general, enduring principle of the *exemplar* is nonetheless still the primary driving force behind the Nazi genocide: the Aryan people must be "purified," purged of its dissident elements, of its potential traitors—of its "enemies."

In a novel that spans fifteen centuries, Pears observes that humanity has learned very little from its mistakes. Sophia, for example, chastises Manlius

for his ethical blindness in "The Dream of Scipio"—"this manuscript, proud, magisterial, and demonstrating only that you have understood nothing at all" (389). Beyond the immediate blindness of Manlius or Marcel, however, history smoothes over the atrocities of the past like the layers of a cataract. For all Pears's skill in bringing Manlius and Olivier to life, it is Julien's story, because of its historical proximity, that no doubt moves the reader most deeply. The Holocaust remains a weeping wound on the collective psyche of modern consciousness, an enduring indictment of not only our, but all civilization. Nonetheless, as Julien predicts: "When all this is over, people will try to blame the Germans alone, and the Germans will try to blame the Nazis alone, and the Nazis will try to blame Hitler alone. They will make him bear the sins of the world" (374). The Germans under Hitler were not barbarians, they were a highly cultured nation, the people of Beethoven and Wagner, of Goethe and Heidegger. By labeling their terrible actions as barbarous, we create a "purifying" distance between them and us, we eschew responsibility for the logic that produced such monstrosities. "Enemies, there is no enemy!" laments Friedrich Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human* (1876), for modern society transforms its citizens into inevitable collaborators with the forces of civilization, herd animals that are incapable of treachery, of real autonomy—in short, we have been trained to give up the freedom to defy and contradict that characterizes a true friend (Nietzsche 194).

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NOTE

1. Pears implies that Julien, from the outset, has felt torn between friendship and civilization. During his collaboration with the Nazis, for example, he spends a great deal of time alone with his Jewish lover, Julia, whom he has hidden away in the countryside by using his position and contacts. In leading this double life, Julien experiences firsthand the differences between friendship (Julia) and collaboration (Marcel).

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